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‘The Collected Home,’ a ‘Lifestyle Shop’ Opens in Rowayton

Author : David Gurliacci

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Risa King began hunting for architectural pieces for her New Canaan home — a unique ca. 1921-built ranch house on Brushy Ridge Road that had been part of a larger estate — straightaway after purchasing it six years ago.

She also traveled to antique markets, craft fairs, estate sales and auctions to find pieces that felt right for its roughly 4,500 square feet of living space. King, a mother of eight with a historian’s sensibility, keen eye for detail and budding entrepreneurship researched the home extensively — it once belonged to a New York City publisher and Agatha Christie sat in her living room — and lived at times in a RV parked out front while the house underwent renovations.

King said that when she renovates a home, “I don’t want to strip it of all it’s character.”

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“I wanted it to echo its past,” She said on a recent afternoon from the eye-catching, comfortably open floor of [The Collected Home](#) in Rowayton, the business she launched last month in the heart of the village.

“I wanted it to feel more rustic and like a barn. I didn’t want it to feel like you walk into a little New England Cape. I wanted people to ask, ‘Was this barn?’ and I could say, ‘Actually, it was.’ ”

“I want to make it modern and do something a little fun and unique to it but also want it to tell you, ‘Hey this is what I was,’ ” she said. “ ‘This is who I am.’ ‘This is where I came from.’ ”

In a roomy, open floor that overlooks the tranquil Rowayton River through a row of windows in the back, the shop sells everything from tables, dressers, chairs, lamps and mirrors to leather-bound books, antique magnifying glasses, hats, paintings and coffee.

And over six years, what King collected in her travels — both large and small items — turned her barn and garage into “a little makeshift warehouse” that forms the basis of The Collected Home.

And — importantly for King, a gatherer of anecdotes and mini-histories not only for the home she designed and decorated but for each individual item she sells — each item at The Collected Home has its own story.

“As I was renovating, I would collect things thinking, ‘OK, I love that but I don’t have space for it’ and it would go in the garage or barn,” she recalled. “Next thing I knew, I had a warehouse full of things because I fell in love with the story of a piece or the proportions or I just knew maybe I can apply it some day.”

She’s no stranger to new living spaces.

A California native who grew up in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Texas (she graduated from high school in Odessa), King attended Brigham Young University and in 1989 had her first child.

That was 29 years ago, and the family after a brief stint in Florida lived in South Orange, N.J. At that time, King and her then-husband knew some people in New Canaan and she came for a visit with her sister-in-law.

That was a house behind the Silvermine Arts Center, her first New Canaan home. She’s been a full-time mom in all the intervening years — her children range in age from 29 down to 14 (with a senior and freshmen at New Canaan High School currently) — and The Collected Home represents her first foray into business.

“I stumbled upon it and when we were looking to make changes, I walked into the home that we lived in, and I just knew it was home,” King recalled.

“I’m excited about it, I really am excited,” she said. “I love interacting with the customers. I love hearing what their dreams are and hearing the things that are important to them. I love when they buy a piece of furniture or an item that is fun. And I love to see that they get excited about it. I bought these things because I loved them. And there is passion there.”

“For example, these bracelets,” King continued, pointing to a rack of leather cuffs, “there is a woman, she’s from California and she’s a single mom and this is her son and she salvages old belts and pieces from old items like furniture, furnaces, lockers, and supports herself.”

King took her time finding the right space for the shop, looking in South Norwalk, New Canaan, Westport and Stamford.

“When I started thinking about it, I was like, ‘Retail is crazy, I don’t want to be tied to a shop.’ I still have two children at home, that’s my number one priority ... I was looking all over. I actually started also doing a little booth in Design Center and I just wanted to meet my clients. I wanted to be connected with them.”

King had met people in the years of acquiring items for her own home and, though it didn’t register as such at the time, that amounted to a strong foundation of networking.

“I have people over in Europe that text me, ‘I have these things.’ I have people down in Texas, in New Jersey, down in Atlanta. I think I knew all along the way. You know one of my dear friends up in Vermont, she said, ‘What are you going to do with this?’ And I would say, ‘I don’t know. Something is going to turn up. I don’t have a vision yet. All I know is that there is something building.’ ”

In a way, King said, she wasn’t deliberately pursuing retail at all. Yet she was confident enough in her own eye and aesthetic sense to create The Collected Home.

Asked how she developed that confidence, King said: “Every single piece I have hand-picked and I picked it because I loved it.”

“After a while, you start looking like a curated hoarder,” she continued with a smile. “I have beautiful things but they are sitting. I don’t have the clientele at this point, I didn’t know quite the direction. Was I going to do a warehouse and offer people only to trade? Was I going to do trade shows? I didn’t know. And as I started thinking about it, I really wanted to see these pieces that I loved. I wanted to see someone else’s face light up when it went into their home. Because to me it wasn’t just a chair. To me, it was a beautiful piece of architecture that was designed by an architect in Holland in 1930’s. It brought joy to me. I wanted to see that next phase and it was a great way to segway into design and being able to place these things in people’s homes. It was a great way to add other little elements too. I love clothing. I love jewelry. I was having a great time working with my children. My oldest son and his wife are helping me.”

Her children — including a son, Jordan, who is an artist — also have helped her hand-select each item.

“They have been a very integral part of the foundation of where we are. My son has an amazing eye ... My daughter-in-law has a really fun eye for eclectic, interesting things and it’s a great balance of ideas and melting. The other pieces I try to find, they are artisan, they’re responsible. The sweaters we brought in here for example, the company raises their sheep, they shear their sheep, spin their wool.”

King’s family has factored into every major decision with respect to The Collected Home, and continues to.

Though it’s true that the storage spaces at her New Canaan home were “bursting” with items she had amassed, “that wasn’t the thing that drove me,” King said.

“What drove me was, as I was looking, I decided along this journey I didn’t need more chaos and complications with being a mom. I have four more years of being a mom and I wanted to make sure that when I did this, things had to fall into place. I am a passionate person and it drives me to a point sometimes of recklessness but what happened was as we were approaching a building, things just didn’t work. It was as if we were pounding our heads against a brick wall. And so we stepped back and went to next place and started saying, ‘OK, I like, this, this, this,’ and go through the checklist and think, ‘OK this can work,’ and then we’d hit that same place again.”

But that didn’t happen at the space at 161 Rowayton Ave. There, when King started putting things out, she wasn’t hitting a brick wall asking why she couldn’t move it.

“Not that there weren’t challenges, but I made it work,” she said. “It’s a beautiful setting and it’s an amazing blank canvas for displaying the art and the furnishings.”

For King, The Collected Home is a “lifestyle shop.”

“When I was thinking about doing it, I wanted to make sure that anybody that walked in here could find something that they were looking for,” she said.

“Whether it’s local honey, a cup of tea, a notepad, a gift card, a bracelet or sweater or scarf, or whether it is a new sofa or beautiful lighting. I really wanted people to walk in here and be in awe and take time to really wander because it’s really a bit of a curiosity shop. You get lost and have to go through things a couple times.”

[The Collected Home](#) at 161 Rowayton Ave., reopens from a Christmas break on Wednesday, Dec. 28. It [can be found here online](#) and [here on Facebook](#).